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## **Shortgrass Country**

**by Monte Noelke**

Lambs in our country probably averaged around the \$40 a head mark last year. I know my lambs brought over \$37 apiece delivered in San Angelo. However, by fall, renegade coyotes and toxic bitterweed had thinned that crop down until we didn't have to take off many culls to shape them into a good set of feeder lambs.

In a dual purpose operation, the expenses are difficult to allocate specifically to one species. But by digging around in the bills and doing a lot of guesswork, before taxes and after interest at the bank, my sheep showed a profit of over six-bits a head.

When I discovered how well they were doing, I started charging the rest of the remaining quarter overhead to the old cows. Big important town businessmen don't base their bookkeeping system on the calendar year. It looked like a nine-month year was about all those old sisters were going to be able to carry, with wool prices so draggy and lamb feeders broker than the heart of a coal miner's sweetheart.

So on the first of October I started making all my checks as "cow feed" or anything that was obviously a hollow horn expense. At Christmas I took further precaution by

buying a 20-pound box of rib chops a six-pound leg of lamb to go in the freezer.

I knew that in a couple of weeks the lambs from this part of the Shortgrass Country were going to be coming out of the feedlot. I didn't want to take a chance of buying back meat that had come so close to being chewed up by a coyote or poisoned by a deadly weed.

San Angelo butchers have learned to at least act like they are selling local lambs. Sheepmen, the meat cutters claim, aren't much of a danger, but they say that one dose of a ranch wife that's been having to thaw out dogie lambs in her kitchen for about 30 winters, makes them wish their boss would buy them something thicker than a white apron to wear.

In the past 30 days lamb prices have rallied a bit. We've been through these wrecks before. However, from the looks of the rank and file at the last sheep and goat herder's convention, we are at a time when we need calm waters.